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ON PAGE C 20

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RFE's Bishop Interview Is Probed

Radio Free Europe (RFE), which gets \$85 million from American taxpayers each year for beaming propaganda to the communist world, has touched off a congressional investigation by broadcasting a lengthy interview with an alleged Nazi war criminal and then firing two employees who blew the whistle on the outrageous program.

To make matters worse, the RFE official directly responsible for the broadcast has not even been reprimanded, possibly because he has a close friend and former RFE colleague on the staff of the president's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski. It is also possible that the Carter administration simply saw nothing wrong with the interview.

Chairman John Gronouski of the Board for International Broadcasting, which supervises RFE, has appointed a special counsel to look into the matter. Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti has asked Gronouski to report any violations of law turned up by the in-house probe.

The interview, last May 1, gave a sympathetic airing to the views of Valerian Trifa. Justice Department documents charge that Trifa, as a leader of the Nazi-oriented Iron Guard in his native Romania, was personally responsible for the deaths of 4,000 Jews in a bloody 1941 pogrom.

He eventually came to this country, settled in Detroit and became a

bishop of the Romanian-American Orthodox Episcopate. The Justice Department is trying to deport him on grounds that he lied about his past when he became a U.S. citizen.

This is the man Radio Free Europe saw fit to put on the air in a 45-minute interview. Congressional investigators for Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman (D-N.Y.) have received evidence that "the broadcast was not simply an inadvertent judgmental error, but represented a conscious management decision made over staff objections." It was, said the investigators, "part of a pattern of such questionable decisions with respect to both substance and personnel made over the past several years."

The investigators also found that RFE employees "have been harassed and threatened for attempting publicly to expose what they consider to be the facts of this case." Indeed, two employees in the Romanian Broadcast Division, Edgar Rafael and Jacob Popper, have been fired, apparently because they told Holtzman about the Trifa situation. RFE president Glenn Ferguson ignored a specific directive from Gronouski not to fire the two men.

Noel Bernard, director of the Romanian Service, is still riding high at RFE. Sources say he is an old pal of Paul Henze, a veteran CIA operative who is now a member of Brzezinski's White House staff. The two served together at RFE's Munich station in the 1950s.

Here's how the White House man treated his friend's decision to dignify a suspected Nazi war criminal with a U.S. propaganda broadcast, according to the secret transcript of a meeting of RFE's governing board obtained by my associate Gary Cohn.

Henze said it was "silly" to be concerned about Trifa's interview.

Board member Walter Roberts snapped: "It's not so silly."

Henze: "It certainly isn't serious from the point of view of the White House."

Roberts: "Well, it's very serious from the point of view of this board."

Henze: "Let me state the White House position on this issue. Bishop Trifa, as an American citizen, represents an important American ethnic group."

Rep. Holtzman has asked President Carter to fire Henze because of this exchange. Instead, the 55-year-old Brzezinski aide has been given even more responsibility for the Carter administration's foreign broadcasts.

Interestingly, a National Security Council official stated that Henze's disgraceful remarks were taken out of context. The transcript proves otherwise.

Footnote: Rep. Dante Fascell (D-Fla.) will hold hearings on the RFE situation. Holtzman has also asked the Justice Department and the General Accounting Office to investigate.